

November 6, 2007

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon (D-LA) thanked his colleagues in the House of Representatives today for overriding the President's veto of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 (WRDA). WRDA had previously passed both chambers of Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support, securing a vote of 381-40 in the House and 81-12 in the Senate. The House successfully overrode the President's veto by a strong bipartisan vote of 361 to 54.

"Today is a historic day for Louisiana, and I thank my colleagues for standing firm and continuing to support this bill that is critical to our state's future," Rep. Melancon said. "For the citizens of south Louisiana, our long wait for authorization for building Morganza, closing MR-GO, strengthening levees in Lafourche, and restoring wetlands across Louisiana's Gulf Coast is almost over."

"After seven years of anxious waiting and too many close calls that ended in disappointment, today south Louisianians are just one more vote away from seeing WRDA finally cross the finish line. I urge the Senate to act quickly, and prove Congress's commitment to protecting America's Energy Coast and the thousand of Americans that live and work in coastal Louisiana."

During debate on the bill, Rep. Melancon spoke in support of WRDA and the critical hurricane protection and coastal restoration projects for Louisiana included in the bill. The speech can

be viewed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL3xF6pSORI>

Rep. Melancon's comments, as prepared for delivery, are below.

Today I ask you to join me for in supporting one of the most critical bills for Louisiana's recovery and future.

The Water Resources and Development Act contains several critical authorizations for hurricane protection projects in South Louisiana.

WRDA authorizes the closure of the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet (dubbed the "Hurricane Highway" after Katrina) which funneled deadly flood waters into the heart of eastern New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish, destroying thousands of homes and devastating these communities.□

Also authorized in WRDA is the comprehensive hurricane protection system known as Morganza to the Gulf, a 64-mile system of levees, locks and floodgates planned for south Louisiana.□

Morganza would offer hurricane protection to about 120,000 people in south Louisiana who currently have no defense against storms and are like sitting ducks in the path of the next killer hurricane.□

This hurricane protection system is so critical, the local communities have been taxing themselves for years to try to build parts of the levee system on their own.□

But they need the federal government to be a partner in this project, and have anxiously followed the progress of WRDA for years, hoping for full authorization for Morganza.□□

WRDA also authorizes funding to bring the federal levees in the South Lafourche Levee District up to 100-year protection, creating better hurricane protection to residents in Lafourche Parish, which is home to one of the largest energy corridors in the country.[]

In addition to these vital hurricane protection projects, WRDA includes a comprehensive coastal restoration plan that will authorize projects to rebuild the protective wetlands along Louisiana's coast.[]

When I travel across south Louisiana, I see with my own eyes how our rich marshes and wetlands are disappearing.[] Louisiana loses a football field-sized piece of land to the sea every 35 minutes.[] During Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we lost over 200 square miles of coastline.[] Our state is literally washing away into the Gulf of Mexico.

The Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) authorized by WRDA is a responsible plan that ensures the marshes and wetlands that buffer our coast from storms are protected, as well as the infrastructure that provides for over 20% of the nation's oil and gas production and the habitat for 30% of the seafood consumed in the United States.

We must override the President's veto today.

Every day WRDA is delayed is another day that 120,000 Americans in south Louisiana remain unprotected from storms because we haven't broken ground on Morganza-to-the-Gulf.[]

Every year that we don't pass a WRDA bill is another year that Louisiana's coastal wetlands wash away even further because we haven't begun work on the LCA comprehensive coastal restoration plan.[]

And every hurricane season that goes by without WRDA becoming law is another season that the citizens of St. Bernard and New Orleans remain more vulnerable to deadly storm surges because the MRGO hasn't been closed.[]

We can't wait any longer.

Congress has come up short in finishing a WRDA bill for seven years now, and today we are so close we MUST NOT be stopped.

Louisiana's hurricane protection and coastal restoration needs must not be pushed aside any longer.

Finally, I would like to thank the committee members and staff for their steadfast dedication to this legislation and I urge my colleagues to support the successful recovery of Louisiana and the rest of the Gulf Coast by voting to override the President's veto and passing WRDA with an overwhelming bi-partisan vote.

Thank you, and I yield back the rest of my time.

The compromise legislation includes authorization for over \$3 billion in projects for south Louisiana, including full authorization for the Morganza-to-the-Gulf hurricane and storm protection system, \$1.9 billion for a comprehensive federal coastal restoration plan, closure of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, and \$90 million to bring the federal levees in the South Lafourche Levee District up to 100-year protection, which will offer better protection to residents in the parish and make their homes eligible for the National Flood Insurance Program.

The bill also authorizes numerous other water resource projects throughout the country.

Specifically, WRDA included full authorization for the Morganza to the Gulf of Mexico Hurricane and Storm Protection System. This 64-mile system of levees, locks and floodgates will provide hurricane and flood protection to about 120,000 people and 1,700 square miles in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes who currently have no hurricane protection. Congressman Melancon has made Morganza to the Gulf one of his top priorities in Congress, and has secured assurances from his leadership that this vital project would not be removed

from WRDA bill.

WRDA also authorizes \$90 million to bring the federal levees in the South Lafourche Levee District up to 100-year protection, which will offer better protection to residents in the parish and make their homes eligible for the National Flood Insurance Program.

Also, WRDA authorizes up to \$100 million to consolidate the scattered levees in lower Jefferson Parish into a comprehensive hurricane protection system for the town of Lafitte.

In addition, WRDA authorizes approximately \$1.9 billion for the Corps of Engineers to carry out the comprehensive program for the restoration of the Louisiana Coastal Area. This program will help restore populated and coastal areas significantly impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and will help in preventing future damage from hurricanes and storm surge, by slowing the continuing land loss, and replenishing the coastal marshes of southern Louisiana. The bill also authorizes the Corps to integrate into this comprehensive program the findings of a current Corps study for "category 5" protection for coastal Louisiana.

Finally, WRDA deauthorizes and calls for the physical closure of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet ("MR-GO"), the 76-mile ship channel through St. Bernard Parish that has been dubbed the "hurricane highway." Rep. Melancon has long advocated in Congress for the complete closure of MR-GO because of the environmental degradation it has caused in St. Bernard Parish and the threat it poses to the parish's residents. Shortly after the Katrina, Rep. Melancon worked in Congress to pass legislation to stop any further dredging of the MRGO to ensure that the channel could begin to silt in while the Corps came up with a plan for the MRGO's long-term future.

Congress is supposed to pass a new WRDA bill every two years. However, no new WRDA bills have been signed into law since 2000 because the House and Senate have repeatedly been unable to reach a compromise on the legislation since then. As a result, many vital projects in south Louisiana have been stalled, awaiting authorization from Congress.